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C O N F I D E N T I A L ABUJA 000549

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: DECL:20MAR2013

TAGS: ASEC CASC KFLO MARR PREL PINR AMGT IZ NI

SUBJECT: TFIZ01: NIGERIA: NO DEMONSTRATIONS AGAINST IRAQ WAR

Classified by Ambassador Howard F. Jeter. Reasons: 1.5 (B & D).

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: The critical Friday flashpoint has passed quietly, with no reports of demonstrations against the U.S.-led Coalition of the Willing (COW) taking place in Abuja or elsewhere. Stern warnings by the authorities and moderate sermons in Juma'at Mosques probably helped. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) The critical Friday afternoon flashpoint (1330-1530) passed quietly March 21, with no reports of demonstrations against the U.S.-led Coalition of the Willing (COW) taking place. Public sentiment remains strongly against the attack, with both Christians and Muslims condemning it. Both northern and southern press reports have concentrated on opposition to the war, concentrating on statements by the Pope, the French and anyone else with negative comments.

¶3. (U) Police officials had warned evening of March 20 that demonstrations against the war on Iraq would not be allowed.

¶4. (SBU) Imams and pastors throughout the country have been holding vigils, praying for the innocent victims of the war. Until now, though, the message has been to remain calm, with some Imams advising the faithful that, while the COW efforts were an attack on Islam, demonstrations would only be hijacked by those with ulterior motives. The result would be injured innocents and substantial property losses.

¶5. (C) COMMENT: Stern warnings by authorities, the calls for restraint by key Imams (including the Chief Imam of the Abuja National Mosque) and some Emirs, a pervasive sense of fatalism and the seemingly slow pace of the military campaign (and the lack of credible reports of huge civilian casualties) have combined to diminish the immediate impetus to demonstrate against the COW's intervention in Iraq. However, it is too early to believe that the potential for protests, including some that might turn violent, has passed. The Embassy will continue to monitor the security situation for developments which might produce demonstrations as the Coalition campaign continues.

JETER